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**Keynote address at 'The 7th APB Theatre School Directors Conference & Theatre Festival'**

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## **Keynote address at 'The 7th APB Theatre School Directors Conference & Theatre Festival'**

### **Abstract**

To The Shanghai Theatre Academy, The Directors of the Asia Pacific Bureau, To UNESCO's International Theatre Institute, and all the students participating in this APB Theatre Schools' Festival. Welcome. NI How!

I am honoured to address this widely experienced company of theatre exponents here today.

Thank you to the APB for inviting us from the University of Wollongong to participate in this year's Festival. (Wollongong by the way is an indigenous name that means 'the sound of the sea').

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## **Asia Pacific Bureau of Theatre Directors 2014**

### **Shanghai Theatre Academy**

13<sup>th</sup> May 2014

#### **Keynote Address**

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participate in this year's Festival. (Wollongong by the way is an indigenous  
name that means 'the sound of the sea').

In 2013 I had the pleasure of being invited to the Asia Pacific Bureau of  
Theatre Directors in Ho Chi Minh City through my colleague and friend Le  
Quy Duong, one of Vietnam's principal arts festival theatre directors.  
Participating in that 2013 APB Theatre Schools' Festival enabled me to report  
to my university the importance of this rapidly expanding network of theatre  
directors and theatre makers.

We who are participating here recognise the vital importance of interaction  
and collaboration with institutions and universities across the Pacific, which  
are maintaining theatre educations. Through upholding theatrical traditions  
as well as providing environments for creative theatrical innovations, the

members of the APB offer mutual support for the preservation of theatrical trainings, including skills trainings, within state recognised institutions. The APB also provides culturally inclusive experiences for students and staff, and enhances global artistic visions for the future of theatre.

I am grateful to UNESCO's International Theatre Institute for its support particularly of those theatrical traditions under threat in our globalised culture. The loss of performance skills and knowledge, much of which has existed for centuries, is of concern for us all and the effort to integrate traditional skills into state recognised institutions is one means through which all of us can participate to protect the diversified cultures on our planet.

Theatre as we know speaks across all languages. Last year Le Quy Duong asked Jeff Janishevski from the Australia's National Institute of Dramatic Arts and me to create a small show for the Closing Ceremony of last year's APB Festival. We had approximately 15 hours to construct the piece which was fine but then we found that the majority of students participating spoke no English, (They were Vietnamese students from independent theatre schools in Ho Chi Minh City yet to be recognised by their government) and Jeff and I spoke nothing else except English. I was so heartened to realise that theatrical forms, where bodily shapes, the use of space, the eloquence of gesture, vocal tones and singing, speak across the boundaries of language. Jeff and I had the most pleasurable and uplifting experience in our set task and in the final instance the students created work that surprised our expectations.

In Australia the aim of Internationalisation is high on university agendas. Courses are encouraged to provide international experiences to students with the aim of recognising the need to understand cultural differences within a globalised setting. However Creative Arts students have in the past had less access to these experiences, with their courses being highly stipulated and

often less flexible than other courses. The Asia Pacific Bureau of Theatre Directors offers a challenge to Australian theatre trainings to register the importance for Australian actors, and directors to be offered a wider vision of what constitutes theatre in the region, the Pacific, to which they belong.

In 1999 on my first visit to Vietnam, which is where I met Aubrey Mellor, we travelled in an Australian delegation of theatre directors and administrators and cultural ambassadors. We travelled with Katharine Brisbane, one of Australia's cultural innovators. She with her husband, Philip Parsons co-founded Currency Press, the first specialist publisher for Australian scripts, set up in the early 1970s. At one theatre training school in Hanoi we were asked, "But what is Australia's traditional theatre." Katharine had to reply – "Our theatre is based on European traditions." This is true, however there are indigenous traditions of performance, which hardly enter the majority of our performance training institutions. So we in Australia face challenges that have already been accomplished in many of the theatrical training institutions represented here.

I am certain that we each have much to offer and to gain through one another's presence. Theatre relies on presence, the meeting of the presence of the performers with the presence of the audience – in all the complex ways in which this interaction may be structured. Living in a time where digitalised presence, rather than embodied presence is ever expanding, I think we are fortunate to be here and I hope over the next week we can truly celebrate our united togetherness

Thank you again for inviting us from the University of Wollongong

